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ULTRASONIC CAVITATION IN LIQUID HELIUM

by

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Abstract

Based on the new interpretation that rotons behave like tiny quantized vortex rings, a theory is constructed to give a complete picture of ultrasonic cavitation in liquid helium. The problem of nuclei of cavitation is approached from a new direction. Questions like the λ -peak of the audible threshold, the distinction among audible, incipient visible and desinent visible cavitation thresholds in He II, the lack of such distinction in He I, the reduction of audible threshold by rotation in He II and the absence of such reduction in He I, are satisfactorily explained. The relevance of the present theory to cavitation in ordinary liquids is briefly discussed.

I. Introduction

The existing experimental information about ultrasonic cavitation in liquid helium consists of the following main features:

- (i) The audible cavitation threshold maintains a fairly constant level between 1000 - 2000 dynes/cm² for both He II and He I for $T > 1.2^\circ \text{K}$, except in the neighborhood of T_λ , where the threshold rises to as high as 6,000 dynes/cm²⁽¹⁾. (Fig. 1).
- (ii) In He II, there is an order of magnitude difference between the visible and audible cavitation thresholds. Whereas no distinction is observed for He I.⁽²⁾ (Fig. 2).
- (iii) In He II, the incipient visible cavitation threshold, i. e. the sound pressure amplitude required to initiate visible cavitation, is greater than the desinent threshold, i. e. the minimum pressure that is needed to maintain the visible cavitation.⁽³⁾ (Fig. 2).
- (iv) The audible threshold in He II is reduced, when the liquid is subject to rotation. The reduction commences when the rotating speed exceeds the value corresponding to the creation of one unit of quantized vortices. No such reduction is observed in He I⁽⁴⁾⁽⁵⁾.

The questions implied in these experimental findings are many. In the following, we shall attempt to construct a theory which can at least qualitatively account for all these puzzling phenomena.

II. The "Nuclei"

The maximum theoretical tensile strength that would be expected from the Van der Waals forces between atoms, is about 10^7 dynes/cm² for liquid helium⁽⁶⁾. Yet the tensile strength as measured by Beams⁽⁷⁾ using the spinning capillary method is about two orders of magnitude smaller, whereas the cavitation threshold, even for the incipient visible cavitation, is about three orders of magnitude smaller. The usual explanation of these discrepancies is that there are nuclei in the liquid. To account for the observed values of the cavitation thresholds, nuclei of radii 3×10^{-4} cm are needed to overcome the surface tension, if audible threshold is our concern⁽⁸⁾. Even for incipient visible cavitation threshold, we would need nuclei with radii about 10^{-5} cm. The requirement for the existence of cavitation nuclei is not unique for liquid helium. For ordinary liquids, we also need to assume the existence of nuclei of similar sizes to account for the discrepancy between the cavitation thresholds and the theoretical tensile strength. There the nuclei are supposed to be suspended solid particles, gas pockets stabilized in cracks, or thermal spikes created by cosmic rays. The problem of cavitation nuclei in ordinary liquids is by no means fully understood. We can only claim that under certain circumstances, those agents just mentioned do play a role to enhance the cavitation. However for liquid helium, it is very doubtful they can play similar roles.

At the temperature of liquid helium, no other substance can exist in the gaseous state, except He⁴ itself or its rare isotope He³. Liquid helium is a very light liquid with a density about 0.14 gm/cm³, and it is also known to be a very good wetting agent. Therefore it is not likely

there would be enough suspended solid particles to serve as cavitation nuclei under the normal circumstance. The effect of cosmic rays may not be as readily ignored. However, we could say that the thermal aspect of its effect is minimal for He II due to the extremely high efficiency of the heat transfer.

Now, the problem of cavitation nuclei could be approached from a different angle in the light of the new interpretation of rotons⁽⁹⁾. According to this new interpretation rotons are considered to behave like tiny quantized vortex rings. Among other properties, there is tension in the vortex core, given approximately by

$$T \approx \frac{\rho k^2}{4\pi}$$

where ρ is the density of the liquid and k is the circulation around the vortex core. For one quantum of circulation, $k = \frac{h}{m} \approx 10^{-3} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ sec}^{-1}$, and $T \approx 10^{-8}$ dynes, which is of the same order of magnitude as the Van der Waals force in the liquid helium. It is to be stipulated that the Van der Waals force is somewhat larger than the vortex tension to prevent the spontaneous rupture of the liquid by the vortex tension. The spontaneous rupture does occur when the boiling point is reached.

The reason that the spontaneous rupture occurs at the boiling point is that the majority of the rotons start to acquire enough quanta of circulation, say n quanta, so that their tension in the vortex core exceeds the Van der Waals force. Below the boiling point, there is practically no rotons with n quanta. The liquid, in the first place, cannot maintain those n -rotons, and dynamical considerations will prevent its occurrence during the formation stage. In some sense, the n -rotons in the liquid can

be considered as holes like those discussed by Fürth⁽¹⁰⁾. They form and disappear, never stable. But we could define a distribution function for those holes at any given instant. The relative number of these holes is very small except in the neighborhood of the boiling point.

Below the boiling point, the stable rotons are those with $(n-1)$ quanta or less. The boiling point, i.e. the point of inception of massive vaporization, is due to the overpopulation of the $(n-1)$ -rotons caused by the increase of temperature. The tensile strength of the liquid then is controlled by these $(n-1)$ -rotons, and their locality are where the nuclei of cavitation are generated.

III. Cavitation in He I

The tension in $(n-1)$ -rotons is smaller than the Van der Waals force, yet comparable. Their difference may be much smaller than the Van der Waals force. This residue force we take to represent essentially the tensile strength of the liquid. This also accounts for the audible cavitation threshold of the liquid. The tension due to imposed sound field may cause the formation of tiny bubbles by the rupture of the liquid. These original bubbles, with radius R_0 , will grow bigger with the aid of cosmic rays. Their subsequent collapse will give rise to noises identifiable with cavitation.

For He I, the energy deposited in the local region around the original bubble, i.e. the thermal spike, as it was called by Seitz⁽¹¹⁾, will enable the bubble to grow to a radius about 3×10^{-4} cm or more. At $R_c = 3 \times 10^{-4}$ cm, the audible threshold of 2,000 dyne/cm² is sufficient to overcome the pressure due to the surface tension $2\sigma/R_c$, and visible cavitation appear. Therefore, with the aid of cosmic rays there

is no distinction between audible and visible cavitation threshold in He I.

In order that the thermal spike, with radius R_0 can grow to a bubble with radius $R_c = 3 \times 10^{-4}$ cm, it is necessary that the time for dynamic growth t_g is smaller than the time of heat escape t_e .

The value t_e can be estimated as

$$t_e = \frac{R_c^2}{4D}, \quad (1)$$

where D is the thermal diffusivity. Taking the thermal conductivity as 5×10^{-5} cal./deg.-cm.-sec. the specific heat as 0.6 cal./g.-deg. and density as 0.14 g./cm³, we obtain $D = 6 \times 10^{-4}$ cm²/sec. Thus

$$t_e \approx 4 \times 10^{-5} \text{ sec.}$$

The value t_g may be estimated from the model of a uniformly expanding sphere in an incompressible liquid⁽¹¹⁾. Since $\frac{R_c}{R_0} \gg 1$, t_g should lie between

$$t_g^{(1)} = \left(\frac{3}{2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \frac{R_c}{c_0}, \quad (2)$$

and

$$t_g^{(2)} = \left[\frac{6(\gamma-1)}{25}\right]^{\frac{1}{2}} \left(\frac{R_c}{R_0}\right)^{3/2} \frac{R_c}{c_0} \quad (3)$$

where $c_0^2 = \frac{p_0}{\rho}$, and p_0 is the initial pressure. $t_g^{(1)}$ is obtained on the assumption that the internal pressure of the expanding sphere is constant; while $t_g^{(2)}$ is obtained on the assumption that the internal pressure p varies according to the relation

$$p = p_0 \left(\frac{R_0}{R}\right)^{3\gamma}. \quad (4)$$

With p_0 taken to be of the order of atmospheric pressure, and $\gamma = \frac{5}{3}$, we obtain

$$t_g^{(1)} \approx 10^{-7} \text{ sec.},$$

and

$$t_g^{(2)} \approx 10^{-7} \left(\frac{R_c}{R_o} \right)^{3/2} \text{ sec.}$$

It is evident that $t_g^{(1)}$ can meet our requirement very well, while $t_g^{(2)}$ will be too big if R_o is smaller than $1/50$ of R_c . How big is R_o ? Each individual roton can have linear dimension of about 10^{-7} cm, but holes much bigger can be produced due to coalescence of many ruptured rotons. Also since evaporation is continuously taking place to fill the growing bubble with additional vapor, while the liquid region surrounding the thermal spike is in a superheated state due to the interaction with the cosmic ray, the pressure inside the bubble may not decrease as drastically as given by (4) during its growth. Still, for a working hypothesis, let us take $R_o = 10^{-5}$ cm.

The bubbly behavior of He I under normal circumstance is due to the superheated state of the liquid. There the "nuclei" are the holes created by the n-rotons. Cosmic rays may again help them to reach the critical radii for boiling. These vapor-filled thermal bubbles of radii of the order of 10^{-4} cm to 10^{-3} cm can also serve as the nuclei for the visible cavitation. This could explain the observation in He I that cavitation bubbles are often seen before they become audible⁽⁵⁾.

IV. Cavitation in He II

The mechanisms for cavitation in He II are essentially the same as those for He I. There are, however, two main differences:

- (i) The heat transfer in He II is controlled by the internal convection and is much more efficient than the thermal

conduction in He I.

(ii) Not all the helium atoms partake in excitations to form rotons, so there is room for the creation of new excitations.

We can immediately see how the novel features of cavitation in He II can now be accounted for.

The audible cavitation threshold of He II is about the same as that of He I, since it is also due to the rupture of the $(n-1)$ -rotons. We again have tiny bubbles of radius R_0 formed. They may again grow somewhat bigger with the aid of cosmic rays. Their subsequent collapse will yield the audible noises.

Now since the internal convection is much more efficient than the thermal conduction, the time for heat escape in He II will usually be much shorter than that in He I. The heat transported by internal convection is essentially transmitted at the speed of the second sound c_2 . Therefore we may estimate t_e as

$$t_e = \frac{R_c}{c_2},$$

where R_c is now the critical radius of the nucleus for incipient visible cavitation.

We may note that $c_2 \approx 2 \times 10^3$ cm/sec for $0.9^\circ\text{K} < T < 1.8^\circ\text{K}$, while c_0 has about the same value as c_2 . From (3), we see that if the growth time t_g is to be kept smaller than t_e , R_c cannot be much bigger than R_0 . This means the heat deposited by cosmic rays is not of much help for the enlargement of the nucleus bubble. This is also reasonable considering that the heat pulse is propagating outward with about the same

speed as that of the expanding bubble wall, so not much heat in the surrounding region can be trapped within the nucleus bubble. Let us again take $R_0 \approx 10^{-5}$ cm, allow a 50% increase due to the interaction with cosmic rays, we then have

$$R_c = 1.5 \times 10^{-5} \text{ cm.}$$

The incipient visible threshold pressure is now

$$P_t = \frac{2\sigma}{R_c} = 4 \times 10^4 \text{ dyne/cm}^2 ,$$

which is about 20 times that of the audible threshold as shown in Fig. 2.

The mechanism of rectified internal convection⁽⁸⁾ will take over when the temperature is high enough so that $2\sigma/R_c$ is no longer dominating over the vapor pressure. This will not happen until the temperature is about 2°K. Then the threshold pressure will be diminished somewhat.

The major reason that the incipient visible cavitation threshold decreases from a relative amplitude of 220 to 1.8°K to about 40 as T_λ is approached is due to the corresponding rapid decrease of the speed of second sound. We may note that at $T = 1.8^\circ\text{K}$, $c_2 = 1.978 \times 10^3$ cm/sec, while at $T = 2.176^\circ\text{K}$, $c_2 = 3.12 \times 10^2$ cm/sec. The decrease of c_2 will cause the proportional increase of t_e and t_g , and consequently the proportional increase of R_c , until at T_λ when the thermal conduction takes over from the internal convection as the principal mode of heat transfer. Then the visible threshold merges with that of He I.

The cavitation bubble of visible size is rather empty. During the rapid growth due to the negative pressure of oscillation, the amount of vaporization cannot catch up with the dynamic process. We need the

knowledge of the accommodation coefficient⁽¹²⁾ to estimate the pressure of the vapor inside the cavitation bubble. But one thing is fairly certain, the larger the amplitude of the pressure oscillation to cavitate, the larger will be the resulting cavitation bubble, and the more rarefied is the vapor inside the cavitation bubble. Consequently the more violent will be the subsequent collapse. The collapse phase is very complex. The bubble may very well break up due to instability before the dynamical collapsing limit is reached⁽¹²⁾. The remnants of the collapsing bubble is expected to be smaller the more violent is the collapsing process. The size of the remnants of the collapsing bubble depends also on the vapor content of the nucleus bubble. The incipient nucleus bubble is likely in an overpressured state due to the relative small t_e . We suggest the size of the resulting remnants of the collapsing bubble will be somewhat larger than the incipient nucleus bubble. These remnants then serve as nucleus bubbles for the desinent cavitation. The desinent nucleus bubbles, contrary to the incipient nucleus bubbles, are not overpressured. The desinent cavitation threshold is one for which the collapse remnants are of the same size as the nucleus bubbles. As t_e gets larger and larger, we expect the incipient nucleus bubble is less and less overpressured, and the size difference between the incipient and desinent nucleus bubbles become smaller and smaller. Thus in He I, the distinction between incipient and desinent cavitation threshold is not observed as markedly at all.

Beaubouef et al⁽¹³⁾ has given another explanation of the distinction between the incipient and desinent cavitation thresholds based on the theory of rectified internal convection. They have a quite satisfactory

qualitative picture. The theory of rectified internal convection can be improved by taking into account of the nonlinear effects. Then the quantitative discrepancy may not be as serious. Their theory will apply to cases that visible bubbles are executing oscillations more or less steadily; whereas the picture we just presented applies to cases that bubbles grow and collapse continuously in a relatively violent manner.

We have stated that the audible thresholds are related to the rupture of the liquid resulting from the break-up of the rotons. We should remark that the tension in the vortex core as given by (1) is only approximate. The tension actually is a slowly increasing function of the radius of the vortex ring⁽⁹⁾. Therefore, if we have particularly large rotons present in the liquid, the negative pressure needed to break up those rotons will be less. The reduction of audible cavitation threshold in He II when the liquid is under rotation can then be satisfactorily explained as follows. When the rotating speed exceeds the value corresponding to one quantum of circulation, vortex rings, i.e. large rotons are shed from the shaft's end. Since it is relatively easier to break these large rotons, the audible threshold is lowered. The existence of these large rotons depends on the availability of the unexcited helium atoms in He II. In He I, no unexcited helium atoms are left⁽⁹⁾. Hence no new quantized vortex rings may be created by rotation, and we do not have the reduction of cavitation threshold. That the reduction of threshold appears with the production of vortices with one quantum of circulation leads us to conclude that $n = 2$, i.e. liquid helium consists essentially of rotons with one quantum of circulation.

The audible threshold, as a function temperature, has a sharp

peak at T_λ . This peak is closely related to the nature of λ -transition. The λ -point, besides being the lowest temperature at which all helium atoms are excited, also marks an order-disorder transition. The order refers to the arrangements and orientations of the rotons⁽⁹⁾. The anomaly of the specific heat at T_λ tells that a substantial portion of the absorbed energy has to be spent on the destruction of the order before it can contribute to the kinetic motion. The process of breaking up the rotons, which inevitably involves the energy absorption, then would also require extra work if it is coupled with the destruction of order. It is interesting to note that the half width in temperature of the threshold peak is of the same order as that of the specific heat curve⁽¹⁴⁾.

V. Discussion

The essence of the present theory is the existence of a weaker bond between atoms than the Van der Waals force. It so happens that the new interpretation of rotons fits quite well for this purpose. However, the λ -point anomaly of the audible threshold, and the reduction of audible threshold in He II by rotation, which is explainable by the present theory, will not follow from the mere existence of weak bonds between atoms. In constructing the complete picture of the cavitation phenomena in liquid, we have relied on the help of external agents like cosmic rays. Experiments under conditions that cosmic rays may be largely shielded off would yield valuable information for the understanding of the problem. The number of rotons decreases with temperature. At low enough temperature when the population of excitations is dominated by the phonons rather than by the rotons, the nature of cavitation may be drastically

different. This is also an interesting area worth our effort to explore.

As we know, aside from having very low temperature, He I behaves just like other ordinary liquids. Therefore if roton theory may apply to He I, it may also be applicable to other liquids. Of course, the predominant rotons are expected to have more than one quantum of circulation. But the general picture as we have constructed for He I may still be valid. It is likely that the problems concerning the low tensile strength, and the nuclei of cavitation of ordinary liquids could be resolved by an analogous roton theory.

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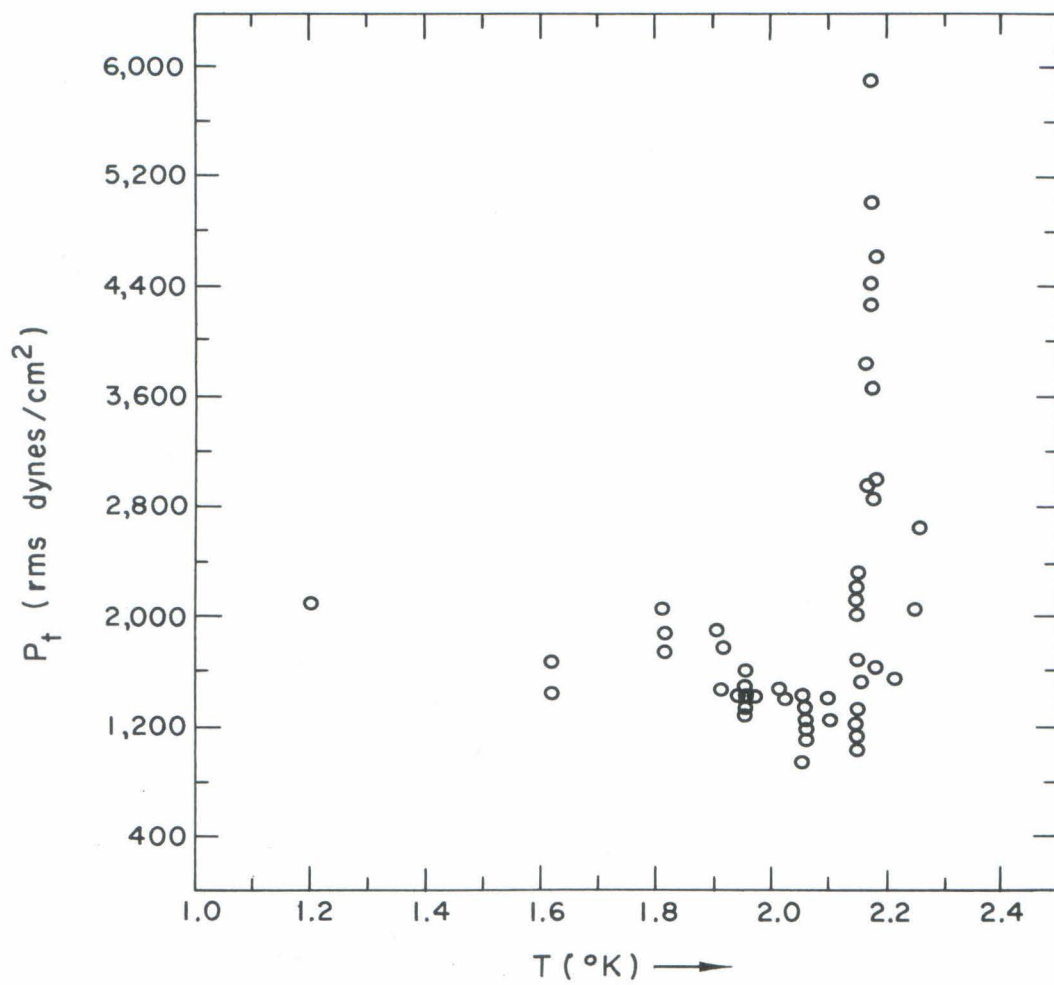


FIG. I CAVITATION THRESHOLDS
REF. (1)

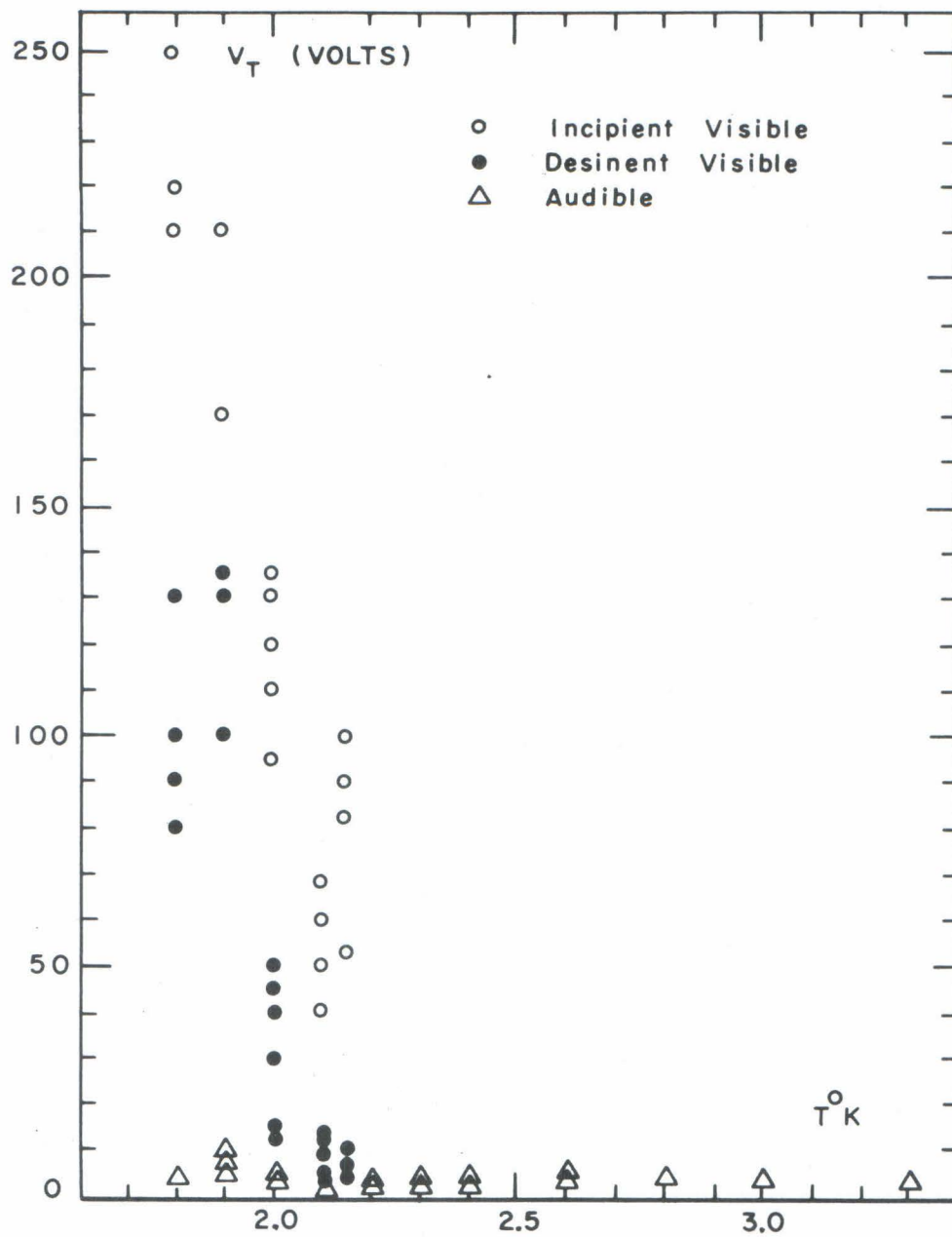


Fig. 2 Dependence of Incipient and Desinent Thresholds on Temperature. Ref.(5)

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14.

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